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ABSTRACT

Three surveys deal with the architectural aspects of country schools in eastern, western and northeastern Kansas. Although country schools of the late 1800's and early 1900's often sprang up before there were pupils to attend them, the surveys reveal that many early schools were 3-month subscription schools which generally did not have their own separately maintained school building. Early school buildings are shown to be dugouts, sod, log, plank, limestone block, or brick structures. The typical early country school is described as being one-story, one-room structures made of wood, having a limestone or concrete foundation, no indoor plumbing, and generally having a porch or vestibule at the entry. The survey also states these structures were painted white and about one-third of them had a cupola-bell tower, one or two doors (to separate sexes), three to four windows which furnished light, and a pot-bellied stove which furnished heat. A description of an outdoor privy is provided along with discussion concerning wells or cisterns for the water supply, regulation school building plans, school yards, furnishings, and locations. It was found that old country schools are being preserved as historical sites, museums, or community centers. (AH)

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COUNTRY SCHOOL LEGACY: Humanities on the Frontier

ARCHITECTURAL ASPECTS OF KANSAS COUNTRY SCHOOLS

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1981

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COUNTRY SCHOOL LEGACY: HUMANITIES ON THE FRONTIER

The Mountain Plains Library Association is pleased to be involved in this project documenting the country school experience. Funding of this project from the National Endowment for the Humanities, cost sharing and other contributions enabled us all to work with the several state-based Humanities Committees as well as many other state and local libraries, agencies and interested citizens. We are deeply impressed not only by the enthusiasm for this work by all concerned but by the wealth of experience brought to bear in focusing attention on—and recapturing—this important part of history, and how we got here. This project seems to identify many of the roots and "character formation" of our social, political and economic institutions in the West.

Already the main Project objective seems to be met, stimulating library usage and increasing circulation of historical and humanities materials in this region. Public interest is rising in regional, state and local history. Oral history programs are increasing with greater public participation. The study of genealogy—and the search for this information—is causing much interest in consulting—and preserving—historical materials. What has been started here will not end with this project. The immediate results will tour the entire region and be available for any who wish the program, film, and exhibit. There will be more discussion of—and action on—the issues involving the humanities and public policies, past and present. The Mountain Plains Library Association is proud to be a partner in this work, the Country School Legacy, and its contribution to understanding humanities on the frontier.

Joseph J. Anderson
Nevada State Librarian
Past President
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Country School Legacy: Humanities on the Frontier Project

Architectural Aspects of Country Schools

Eastern Kansas Report

Paul A. Haack

Not long after the Kansas Territory was opened in 1854, settlers on the east side of a school district near Lawrence built a log cabin schoolhouse. As was common with small structures, the house had no permanent foundation but was simply set on a couple of log skids.

A few years later, the population had shifted to the west side of the district, and most children had to travel quite a distance to school. So, one night a group of west-siders hitched their teams to the schoolhouse, and dragging it on its built-in skids, moved it to their side of the district!

"The great schoolhouse theft" was avenged several nights later when the east-siders stole the school back to their side of the district, leaving the west-siders to redistrict and build their own school.

The following generation of schoolhouses tended to be larger and built on more permanent foundations, effectively eliminating any further adventures of this sort. And, the foundation seems a logical place to begin a description of the architectural aspects of eastern Kansas country schools.

Most of the more than 30 country schools surveyed in this area thus far are built on native stone foundations (Kansas sand- or limestone). Several existing schools have stone and/or concrete basements, but these are more recent structures. Those schools built between 1870 and 1915 tended to have simple, low, stone and concrete foundations with no basements.

The walls of several of the earliest structures, most dating from the 1800's,

were built of native stone blocks. The walls of most of the recent structures are of brick. By far the greatest number of extant country schools are constructed of wood with lap-siding exteriors. Invariably the color of these buildings was white, dispelling the notion of "little red schoolhouses," at least in this area. All of the schools surveyed were of single story type, and virtually all were (at least originally) one room types.

The older schools usually had 3 or 4 large 4 or 8 pane windows on each side. Some more recent designs had fewer windows on the north and/or west sides, with almost solid window walls on the south and/or east sides -- presumably to protect from winter winds and take advantage of sun light and warmth (passive solar heating)!

Doors were most frequently placed front and center, or one on each side of the front wall. The separated front doors were meant to keep the sexes separated when entering the school; but interestingly, a couple of schools were found to have the two doors leading to a vestibule, from which a single door led to the classroom! Most of the schools surveyed were found to have only the front door(s); although the most recent designs tended to have additional exits.

Internally, the structures most frequently have board floors, and everything from board to metal ceilings. Many now have some type of acoustical tile on the ceilings. Side walls often have wainscoting with plaster above. A few blackboards were found, but little other school equipment was seen. Most of the schools had no semblance of plumbing, but did have some kind of a stove (originally wood or coal burning) placed most ferquently near the center back of the building. There was often a slightly elevated platform at the front of the room, among other things to provide the teacher with an overview of the students when seated at his or her desk.

Approximately half of the buildings surveyed had some notable decor on the

upper front façade. Most often this consisted of a type of wood-shingle design. Again, approximately half of the structures had a porch or vestibule. Most often, roofs were covered with asphalt shingles; however, in many cases it was apparent that the original roofing was wooden shake-shingles. Several structures were observed to have sheet metal roofing, while one had sheet metal on the north exposure and shingles on the south!

Only about one-third of the schools ever had cupola-bell towers. Only half of these structures remain today, and no bells were found in the remaining bell towers. Craftsmanship, both stone- and woodwork, seems excellent by today's standards, and the generally sturdy condition of the structures surveyed attests to the excellence of that craftsmanship.

That leaves only the stone and later the brick or metal flue-pipe chimney--and a final anecdote as reported by a former country school student now residing in Topeka: Occasionally, when a particularly threatening test was due, or when a schoolday was simply taking too long to pass, a young man would be boosted up on the roof during lunch hour to stuff rags in the chimney pipe. By the time school was to resume, the room would be filled with a dense cloud of smoke, and invariably, school would be dismissed until the next day.

O. Ekblaw
1/6/81
U. of Kansas
Lawrence

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Donna Jones
Western Kansas

Country schools were built within walking distance of most farms in the early 1900's. Construction materials used resembled those used in the homes of the area.

Dugouts or part of a private residence were usually the first types of schools. Dugouts were built by digging out a part of a hill and putting branches on the top and covering the opening. There were some inevitable problems with dugout schools. The heat from the school would attract animals, and sometimes a pig, cow, or other animal would walk onto the roof and fall through into the schoolroom. One warm school roof attracted a rattlesnake that fell through and landed on the pot bellied stove. The snake fried--the teacher said that she knew what hell was like as she remembered seeing the snake.

Early schools were also made of sod. The community would get together and divide the labor. Some people would plow the sod, while others stacked it together, overlapping the pieces. These sod and dugout schools were warmer in the winter and cooler in the summer than the later wood schools.

In the middle of Kansas, where there are quarries of stone, many schools were constructed of native limestone. In the west, where timber was available, schools were built of logs. Later, most of the schools in the west were made of lumber. However, these wooden schools often had chinks in them. Through these big cracks, one could often see outside the school. There was one school where the floor had cracked and mice came into the school. The boys enjoyed yelling "mouse" and watching the teacher's reaction. The boys would then chase the mouse out of the school.

Sanitation in the schools was interesting. Early privies had a drawer under them that pulled out. Later, the sanitary pit privy was developed. Attached is a complete description. Also attached is a copy of the "Report of School Inspection by County Health Officer."

It was important that the privy be uphill and far enough away, the opposite direction of the ground water flow from the well or the water could be polluted.

Some schools had wells, others had sisterns and many children and teachers carried water to the school. Sisterns often caught water from the roof when it rained. Sometimes there was a charcoal filter to help keep the water sanitary. The only problem was that often the filters were not kept clean. When the chain and bucket pumps were used to pull up water, little toads, frogs and other debris would come up if the filter was not working properly. √ spelling

When the water was carried in it was usually put in a crock pot with a spicket or dipper. The crock was almost always on top of an orange crate.

The yard around the school was also important. It is surprising that most of our country cemetaries were fenced and few of our country school yards were. And if they were on the field side, it was often barbed wire, probably the worst possible fence material. They all needed fence between the playground and the road that was often very close. The early playground equipment included wood slides and merry-go-rounds that had open spaces. These open spaces often resulted in injuries to children. √ spelling

Some of the western Kansas schools had special features such as bell towers, but almost all were built according to a plan book. They had one door that entered the school room. Later most schools added an ante room, to cut down on the draft. Coats were sometimes kept here and often in the back of the school room. A few schools had two entrances off the ante room into the classroom, one for the boys and one for the girls. Many classrooms had a portion of the floor in the front raised a few inches so that the teacher's desk and the recitation bench would be a little higher than the students' desk.

The classroom often had map cases, maybe a globe, usually a dictionary,

sometimes an encyclopedia, and occasionally a few books in their library. In later years, most schools had small libraries.

Today, in a county that might have had 100 to 200 schools, there may be 10 or fewer schools left. In the western half of Kansas there may be 15 to 20 schools that are well maintained. A few are still used for community meetings and some are restored as schools. The rich history from these schools is quickly fading as schools are torn down, students and teachers are passing on, and the memories are fading. That is why this project has been such an exciting opportunity to help preserve some of our early heritage and discuss it next summer with the general public.

Donna R. Jones

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cases is definitely influenced by the density of population. In villages and the portions of towns and cities that are not equipped with sanitary sewers the infectious excreta in a single insanitary privy may endanger hundreds of people, while usually only a single household is endangered by an insanitary privy at an isolated farm home.

In the prevention of the epidemic occurrence of excreta-borne diseases, therefore, sanitary disposal of excreta in towns and villages is equal in importance to the improvement of public water supplies.

Kansas has succeeded in decreasing its typhoid fever death rate from 25.7 to less than 1 per 100,000 population. This represents a decrease of more than 96 percent. A few years ago diarrhea and enteritis were responsible for nearly 30 percent of all deaths of infants less than one year of age. Better care and feeding of infants, together with improved water supplies and waste disposal in cities, have materially reduced this figure. It is still necessary that continuing vigilance be maintained to assure this gain and further reduce infant morbidity and mortality.

There is no reason that those who do not have the convenience of sewers should not be provided with sanitary methods of waste disposal. The primary justification for a sewerage system is the prevention of the health menace from insanitary disposal of excreta. Except in the larger cities, homes that are served by a water-carriage system of sewerage remain in fly range of the surrounding unsewered homes. Therefore, unless the facilities for the removal of excreta or for otherwise preventing the access of flies to exposed excreta are extended to embrace these other homes, the primary object of the water-carriage system of sewerage for the heart of the community has not been attained.

The construction of a privy, though simple, involves certain specific details that must be correct in construction in order that the privy will afford the protection it is designed to provide. Also, like the new car, or the new home, it must receive *proper care* and *maintenance*, if it is to give satisfactory service.

The following sketches and discussion give in detail the approved method for building sanitary-pit-type toilets. Section 1 covers details and specifications where a large number of units is planned; Section 2 covers plans and specifications for the individual contemplating the construction of a single unit.

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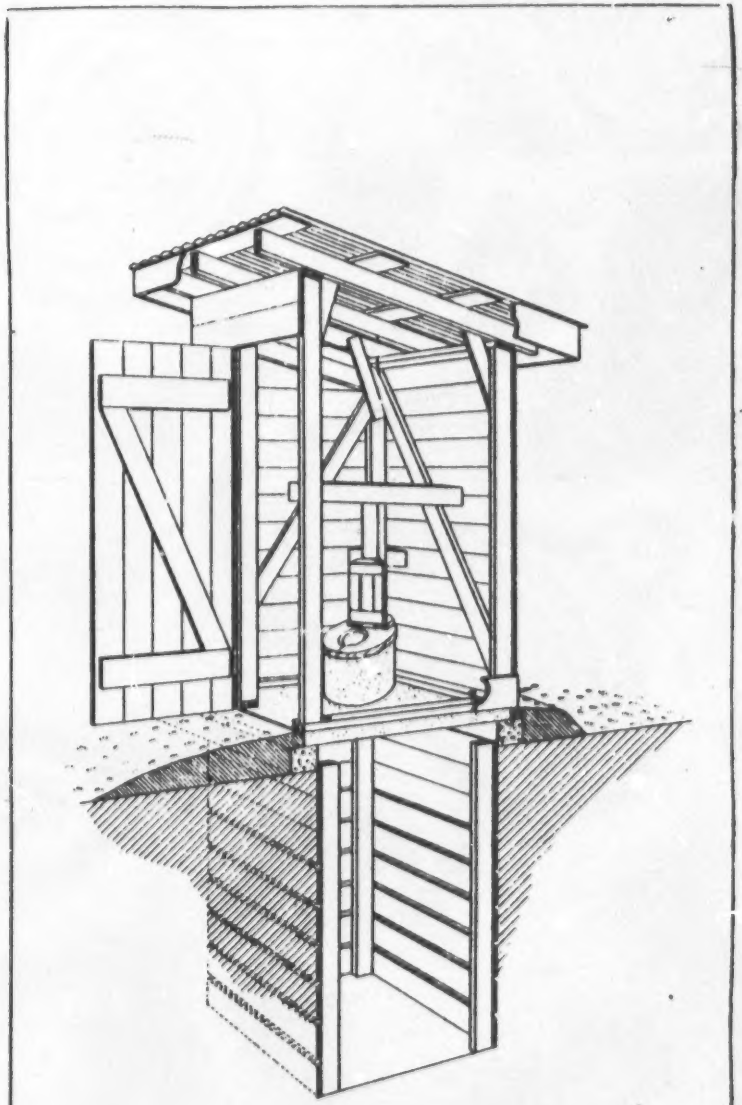

SANITARY PIT PRIVY

FIGURE 1

SH-1

KANSAS STATE BOARD OF HEALTH

REPORT OF SCHOOL INSPECTION
By COUNTY HEALTH OFFICER

Name of School _____ No. of Pupils _____ Date of Inspection _____

School District _____ City _____ County _____

SUMMARY STATEMENT

Signature of County Health Officer

1. SITE Area Location Topography	3	2	1	0	7. CLASSROOMS Size Furniture Maintenance	3	2	1	0
2. BUILDING Construction Interior Exterior Screens Maintenance	3	2	1	0	8. WASHROOMS and SANITARY FACILITIES Toilets Lavatories Showers Drinking Fountains	3	2	1	0
3. WATER Source Chlorination Distribution Quantity	3	2	1	0	9. PLAYGROUNDS Site Size Surfacing Equipment	3	2	1	0
4. WASTE DISPOSAL Toilets Sewers Sewage treatment Garbage	3	2	1	0	10. FOOD SANITATION Food sources Storage Preparation Serving Dishwashing	3	2	1	0
5. HEATING and VENTILATION Furnace Thermostats Temperatures Air circulation Odors	3	2	1	0	11. SAFETY Fire Safety Explosion Safety Shop Safety First Aid	3	2	1	0
6. LIGHTING Natural lighting Artificial lighting Glare	3	2	1	0	12. HEALTH OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL Pre-employment Examination Periodic Examination Health Policies Physical and Mental Health	3	2	1	0

RATING: 3 Excellent 1 Substandard—acceptable for temporary use
2 Satisfactory 0 Substandard—not acceptable

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MAKE FIVE COPIES: White for School Board
Yellow for Health Officer
Blue for County Superintendent
Green, Pink } for State Board of Health

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SARA Judge

COUNTRY SCHOOL HOUSES IN CENTRAL AND NORTHEAST KANSAS

A decade before Kansas became a state and years before she was even formally organized as a territory, white settlers moving into the state founded schools. Often before there were children to attend them, schools sprang up as soon as the oxen were unhitched from the covered wagons and families declared their intentions to remain on the prairies.

Many of the early schools were three-month "subscription" schools whose pupils paid tuition at the rate of a dollar to a dollar and a half a month for the privilege of attending. Such schools most generally did not have their own separately maintained school building, but were held in the home of the teacher, a patron of the school or, as in the case of the first school in Lawrence, Kansas (begun in 1855), in the back office of Dr. Charles Robinson, a prominent figure in the anti-slavery New England Emigrant Aid Society and later the first governor of Kansas[1]. One of the first schools for white children, and indeed one of the first schools in the territory, was started in 1851 and held in the old Kaw Indian mission building in Council Grove. This two-story building of native limestone had also done duty as a Methodist mission for the Kansa Indians, a council house, a church meeting house, and a place of refuge for early settlers during Indian raids.[2] Mr. T. S. Huffaker established this 1851 school and classes where formed with twelve to fifteen pupils, children of government employees, mail and stage contractors, traders,

blacksmiths and others connected with Indian affairs and commerce on the Santa Fe trail.[3] This building is currently maintained as a state historic site.

Central and northeast Kansas are blessed with an abundant subsurface building resource in the form of limestone beds. Surprisingly, though, the initial school houses built in this part of Kansas, in the 1850s and 1860s, were constructed of the supposedly-scarce material, wood. These structures were either log cabins or, as in the case of the first school house in Pottawatomie county (built in 1859 at St. George, Kansas), were built of sawn cottonwood planks which "warped so badly that it scarcely kept the sun out, not to mention the wind and rain."[4] In a log cabin school house, built in 1862 near Westmoreland, also in Pottawatomie county, each father constructed the log-slab bench for his children to sit on and there was one table, set in front of the single window, whereon the children practiced their writing.[5] In Cloud county a log school was built in 1864 at the Elm Creek settlement. The homemade furnishings consisted of variations on a theme of split logs and peg legs. The first teacher there, Rossella S. Honey, later recalled that her desk "made from one immense walnut log, split and polished, with peg legs like the seats" had to be dismembered because that long walnut plank was needed for use as the bottom of Mrs. John Thorp's coffin (the sides of the casket were made from pieces of packing cases)[6]

Advantage was eventually taken of the abundance of limestone as a building material and many of the substantial, thick-walled stone school houses built still dot the Flint Hills, standing stolidly on the corners where two section roads cross. Peter Reid, an emigrant from Scotland, settled in Atchinson county in 1856. He helped survey school lands in the county and, according to family history, in 1870 helped cut the stone that built the new Good Intent school northwest of the town of Atchison. This native stone building with its ornate belfry and unusual doorway placed on the side rather than front of the building, served three generations of Peter Reid's descendants as a school and community center until being closed in 1965 as a result of state-enforced consolidation. The Good Intent school was reportedly the largest rural school in Atchison county and was taught in 1902-1903 by Miss Ethel Martin, a daughter of former Kansas governor John Martin.[7]
Another stone school house with an interesting history is the Stone Corral school, located in Rice county, Kansas. Stone Corral took its name from a little settlement and outfitting stop on the Santa Fe trail, where it crossed the Little Arkansas river. Along with a toll bridge, blacksmith shop, soldiers' quarters, etc., this location featured a "fort" or corral wall that enclosed an area 300 feet square with a seven foot high wall of stone. The walls were two feet thick and featured portholes for defense. Defense was its primary function, especially when the Kiowas, Comanche, Arapahoe, and Cheyenne began their continuing raids in

1864 against stage stations on the Santa Fe trail.[8] In the 1880s when lumber was in short supply on the central Kansas prairie and a school was needed at the intersection of Plum and Saxman roads just west of the Rice county line, the handiest source of raw materials for building was this long-since abandoned stone corral just a mile north of the school site. A former teacher, Virginia Huey of Hutchinson, Kansas, was not aware of any ethereal emanations from the stone walls that had seen Indian war parties, cavalry soldiers and the likes of people like "Buffalo Bill" Cody: "If you're trying to teach more than 30 children, all ages and sizes, half of them from the farms, and half of them from the oil fields, you don't have a moment to sit around and think of anything spooky."[9]

The first schools were usually built by local people, often by the patrons of the school themselves. Regardless of materials, the basic design was a rectangular building ranging in size from 16'x30' to 25'x50'. Three or four windows would be set in each of the two long walls. One of the short walls would be windowless (the blackboard and teacher's desk generally were along this wall) and the wall opposite this would contain the doorway and cloak room. There seemed to be no consistency as to whether there would be one door, one double door, or two separate doors. The writer has found no reference as to why two separate doors were the practice in some schools. Theories range from fire safety to separate entrances for boys and girls. The latter suggestion may hold some weight because informants have stated that there were

often separate cloak rooms for boys and girls. In the majority of school houses the writer has observed, however, there was simply one door. Most often the schools had a vestibule or anteroom attached to the front of the building as the initial entrance. If there was no vestibule, there was generally a cloak room anyway, with partitioning wall setting it off from the classroom proper and presumably acting as a sort of buffer for winds coming in the front door.

With the growth and increasing involvement of the state Department of Public Instruction in the guidance of school life, uniform plans for school buildings began to be issued in the Department's biennial reports. Floor plan suggestions were provided for more attractive and efficient buildings. Suggestions were also included for more efficient heating methods to replace the round coal-and-cob-fueled stove set squarely in the center of the school room. Quite elaborate designs were presented for placement of stoves for improved venting and heat circulation, and some schools even dug a basement and put their stoves down there with floor vents letting up into the school room.

Windows were placed along either side of the school house, generally three or four windows to a side. This was to allow for the maximum use of sunlight as no artificial light was used in the day time. Walls were equipped with kerosene lamps in wall brackets for the times when the school served as a community facility for nighttime functions. In the 1920s for a brief

time a directive was issued that, for the best effect of lighting on students' eyes, windows should only be placed along one wall of the school building, which resulted in the boarding up of windows in many schools. The practical result of this was that children in the half of the room opposite to the windows were often "in the dark". This was a short-lived practice.[10]

Though there seems to be widespread interest in their rural educational experience and in the preservation of the schools they attended among the people the writer has been in contact with, generally little has been done to preserve these schools from gradual or immediate ruin. When the rural schools were closed in Kansas, beginning in the forties and continuing into the sixties, the buildings and furnishings were sold at auction. The buildings themselves have been used as homes, machine sheds, or for hay and grain storage, or they have just been left vacant. The furnishings - bells, desks, wall decorations, blackboards, stoves, etc. - were often purchased for sentimental reasons by former students. This portable memorabilia is somewhat scattered in the counties but the owners generally show great attachment to these mementos of their school time. There are, however, numerous cases in Kansas where such mementos have been donated to help furnish school houses that have been rehabilitated into local museums of rural education. At least one such school, Vicker school, district #49 in Miami county, Kansas, has been privately rehabilitated by the present owners, Mr. and Mrs. Ted

Alpert, but generally such rehabilitative efforts are undertaken by community groups and local historical societies. The Marysville city park in Marshall county, Kansas has a school house that has been moved in to town, refurbished, and opened for community use as a museum. A rural school that was moved onto the grounds of the Sunflower State Expo in Topeka opens its doors to groups of school children who get the chance to experience what it was like when their grandparents went to school. The Honey Creek school in Mitchell county, Kansas was moved to a roadside park on U. S. highway 24 in Beloit and is now designated as a national monument affiliated with the Library of Congress. The lovely, native stone Snokomo school in rural Wabaunsee county, Kansas was restored at its original location by the Silent Workers club of Paxico, Kansas, and now operates as a museum. The Cottonwood school south of Wamego, Kansas, is used as a 4-H and community building, as is the Adams Creek school in Pottawatomie county. The large and stately one-room Sales school in Pottawatomie county is maintained by the Sales community as a meeting place. Again, many of the informants who have corresponded with the writer have indicated a genuine desire to preserve old school buildings in their areas if funds were available.

Each of the rural schools in Kansas was as unique as the community who built it and whom it served as a center for educational, spiritual, and civic growth and unity.

by Sara E. Judge
"Country School Legacy" project
January 10, 1981

FOOTNOTES

[1]Emporia state university Department of English. "School - then and now." Heritage of Kansas, vol. 7, no. 2, May 1963. p. 5.

[2]Ibid. p. 5.

[3]Ibid. p. 5.

[4]Maskil, Doc. The early history of Pottawatomie county compiled from the research of W. F. Hill. Westmoreland, Kansas: Westmoreland recorder, 1954. p. 4.

[5]Ibid. p. 4.

[6]Emporia state university Department of English. p. 7.

[7]"How Good Intent was named." Atchison Globe, September 12, 1976, Atchison, Kansas. p. 3A.

[8]American atlas company, comp. Centennial atlas of Rice county, Kansas. McPherson, Kansas: 1971. p. 344.

[9]Kansas state historical society, comp. Rice county schools - Clippings, vol. 1. p. 9.

[10]Personal communication, Mrs. Rose Watters, Blue rapids, Kansas. November 21, 1980.